

## **The Sikh Gurus, The Sikhs and The Khalsa**

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*This article is based on excerpts from the Spirit of the Sikh written by Professor Puran Singh in 1920's and published by Punjabi University Patiala in two volumes during 1982. Puran Singh was a great scientist, mystic poet, and a visionary and interpreter of the Sikh cultural consciousness. This article reflects the personal views of the great Sikh scholar which seem to be relevant for understanding Sikhism and the geopolitical aspirations of the Sikhs.*

### **1. The Sikh Gurus**

As usual, the world is too inert, too late, to welcome its prophets who bring an altogether new message. So it has been with the Sikh Gurus. The Hindus just condescended with a superior air to say that the Sikhs are of them- 'born out of them'. Culturally and academically and even racially this was not wrong, but inspirationally, it was an attempt to thwart all the potentialities of the Guru's universal message.

After Buddha, it was Guru Nanak who for the first time championed the cause of the masses in caste-ridden India. The rich aristocracy and the degraded priests of Hindus and Muslims did not listen to the Guru, but the oppressed people followed him with joy. He made a whole people throb with love and life. For more than a century and half his message was secretly flaming in the bosom of the people when the genius of Guru Gobind Singh gave them the eternal shape of the Disciples, the Khalsa [1].

Guru Gobind Singh is the Guru of the modern times. Assuredly, the slaves of India have not understood him so far and are not capable of understanding his genius. The shadow of his large personality falls far away above the head of centuries, and the so-called best intellectuals of India, when they spread out their mind to understand the Guru, get bruised by mere thorns and give him up as something not as spiritual as Guru Nanak. If they cannot see Guru Gobind Singh as the highest, brightest culmination of Guru Nanak,

assuredly they do not understand that King of revolution of religious thought, the great Guru Nanak.

The world of thought has yet to understand the Ten Gurus in the splendour of their thought which has been misunderstood due to the Brahmanical language they had to employ to express themselves and to the Brahmanical environment which always has been inimical to the true progress of man [2].

Guru Granth of the Sikhs is the most authentic account of the Guru's soul. It is a pity that some Sikh enthusiasts and half-baked scholars, perverted by the thought of the age, have tampered with the meanings they themselves wish to give it. But the authentic word of Guru Granth can never be lost to the world. And as the Bible is translated into different languages, so Guru Granth will have to be put by poets of different nations into their own language direct from their own souls. Life alone can translate life [3].

The Guru Granth is the history of the Sikh soul, and its translation is to come through the great figure of the social reconstruction of human society as the Khalsa, where shall reign love, and not hatred. It is society founded on the highest verity of love of man, inspired by the inspiration of God-like men who symbolize truth as personalities of love, grace and mercy, such personalities are images of the personalities in the unseen. Giving ourselves in infinite self-sacrifice in the name of God, washing away the selfishness of man in the supreme love of the Guru, is the simple, but extremely difficult path of discipleship. Without the Word of the Guru, and the ideal, the Khalsa, which stands for the sovereign society, there is no key to the heart of Guru Nanak and his anthems for the liberation of man. The destruction by the Guru of the Brahmanical citadels of superstition (as in Guru Nanak's Asa-Ki-Var or in the great Kabits and Sawayyas of the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, or in the Vars of Bhai Gurdas, the great exponent of Sikh ideals), is symbolic of the destruction of all lies on which human society might be wrongly founded and misguided. Guru Nanak is universal, but he is mostly the Prophet of the future. Freedom of the human mind and soul is the Guru's passion [4].

The Guru did not eschew politics-in fact he made the liberation of the people the cause of the assertion of his heroism; but surely, if the Sikh lives on the surface only, like the Englishman, for mere politics, votes and such inanities, one straying from the Guru's path forthwith becomes a traitor to his cause. All freedom is but a spiritual tradition

of the life of the Khalsa: if the Khalsa spirit is dead, all freedom fails. The Khalsa is the son of the Guru who brings everywhere his Heaven and its delectable freedoms [5].

The following words were addressed by Guru Gobind Singh to the Sikhs at Nander on the day of his departure from this world: "I have entrusted you to the Immortal God. Ever remain under His protection, and trust none besides. Wherever there are five Sikhs assembled who abide by the Guru's teachings, know, that I am in the midst of them. He who serveth them shall obtain the reward thereof-the fulfillment of all his heart's desires".

"Read the history of your Gurus from the time of Guru Nanak. Henceforth the Guru shall be the Khalsa and the Khalsa the Guru. I have infused my mental and bodily spirit into the Granth Sahib and the Khalsa.

Then uttering "*Wah Guruji Ka Khalsa, Wah Guruji Ki Fateh*" he circumambulated the sacred volume and said, "O Beloved Khalsa, let him who desireth to behold me, behold the Granth Sahib. Obey the Granth Sahib. It is the visible body of the Guru, and let him who desireth to meet me diligently search its hymns. And lastly keep my kitchen ever open and receive offerings for its maintenance".

## 2. The Sikh People

The Sikh people, unlike other people of India, are a race of straight forward men of action, whose simple minds, informed of the Eternal by the Guru, shrinks from the idle speculation of the Brahminical mind, and also shrinks from the too theological law of the Muslim, and lives the simple, austere life of incessant labour that characterises the tiller of soil everywhere. They have an inventive genius and love the practical pursuits of life - agriculture, tool-making and engineering. They are, as a people, fond of colonisation. Given opportunities and modern education, this nation has potentialities of progress which no other set of people in India possesses in so remarkable a degree [6].

Four hundred years ago, the inhabitants of the Punjab were all slaves. The invaders that came by the Khyber Pass destroyed by the sword all Indian hopes of ever becoming a self-governing nation. What could the invaders have achieved if the will to die for freedom were there in the soul of India?

Out of the downtrodden, oppressed, lifeless slaves of the Punjab, Guru Gobind Singh moulded a nation which has in it the potentialities of a progressive nation of men. In the whole of India, the Sikh nation is the brightest spot still which has an inexhaustible will to die for the love of its ideals. When they are called upon, the Sikhs seek death as moths seek light. Guru Gobind Singh cut the moorings of this nation from its racial past and a nation wholly modern in spirit and mind sprang up out of the Guru's mind, with a highly inspiring and most deeply reactive tradition and history of its own.

The Sikh was made to be a feast-giver on the roadside, to spend as the day ended, all he earned daily: and it is his self degeneration if he accumulates and thinks of the morrow. The thought of the morrow for a Sikh is irreligious. To a true Sikh, death is better than security earned with dishonesty. His giving away of his labour and love is like the lamp distributing light, like the rose distributing its fragrance. A Sikh's spontaneous and natural function of life is such; otherwise he is not a true Sikh.

The Culture created by the Guru is in one word, the all-mind divine culture. The Sikh, like the Guru, like sunlight and air and water belongs to all: he is culture-embodied, love-incarnate, sweet fragrance of humanity that kindles dead souls. Men are very rare and the Sikh still more so.

If you wish to know the Sikh, love him. There is a gleam under the stack of hay, such as Moses beheld at Sinai. The Sikh body politic is a heap of immense matter in which still scintillates the spirit. The hair of the Sikh distinguishes him and his unique love. In Brahmanical India, the spirit itself would have died without those who have worn this rather unkempt exterior. And those of Brahmanical India who might desire life, and having got the life spark to maintain it, have similarly to isolate themselves [7].

Religious fanaticism was that the Guru never allowed to enter his court. Religious superstition was eradicated from the very blood of the Sikh. The Guru cleaned with his sword the darkness that clung and clings still to the endless philosophical hair splitting of the Hindu and the Jain. The liberation of the human mind was the first and foremost thought of the Guru. He liberated man from the slavery of the Devas, the Vedas, and put him to work [8].

If the Sikh, as he was born, had ever been afforded opportunities of spiritual isolation from the rest of world, to develop his powers of self-realisation, and his instincts

of art and agriculture and colonisation, his would have been by now, one of the best societies of divinely inspired labourers, of saints living by the sweat of their brow.

But Brahminism was there to engulf it from within. His political temper, the result of his complete mental liberation and his passionate love of liberty pitched him against the Moghuls from the time of its birth. Out of the jaws of death, if the Khasla has still come out, there is much hope for it yet. All is not yet lost.

### **3. The Khalsa Ideal - State and Democracy**

The Khalsa is the ideal future international state of man: it is an absolute monarchy of the kingdom of heaven for each and every man, the absolute democracy, distribution of bread and raiment of the kingdom of labour on this earth - all in one. It is democracy of feeling all on this physical plane of life, where most misery is due to man's callousness to man. It is brotherhood of the souls where intensity of feeling burns out all differences [9].

In the realms of the soul, each is to have his own measure of the Guru's joy and sorrow and love and feeling and spiritual delight, according to his individual capacity. This will constitute the measure of the real aristocracy of each one's genius; but bread and raiment, the barest necessities of the physical body shall, in this kingdom of love for the Guru, never be denied to any one. If the Guru's ideal state, or even an approach to it, is ever made by man, no one will thenceforward die of hunger or go naked. Death cannot be prevented, innate differences cannot be destroyed; but physical privation will be prevented here on this earth by man himself. Let mountains be high, flowers small and grass low, but all shall be clothed with the beauty of God and fed with His abundance. The true vindication of the Khalsa commonwealth and its ideals as announced by Guru Gobind Singh, have yet to appear in terms of the practice of those ideals by those having faith in the Guru. The modern world is, however, busy evolving its version of the Guru's Khalsa state out of social chaos. This much be said at once, that the Khalsa is more than a mere republic of votes of little men who must be influenced to give votes. It is more than the Soviet, which aims at the change of political environment and law, to bring the Heaven of equal distribution on earth because without the transmutation of the animal substance of man, of selfishness into sympathy, there can be no true socialism.

The Guru Khalsa state is based on the essential goodness of humanity, which longs to share the mystery and secret of the Creator, and longs to love the Beautiful one living in His creation. The Guru thus admits man to an inner kingdom of the soul, where each and every person receives such abundance of pleasure and the beauty of His Love, that selfishness dies of itself. Inspiration to the higher life drives out the lower. Each one, according to his worth and capacity to contain, has enough of the inner rapture of the beauty of God in him, so that he lives quite happy and contented without interfering in anyone's affairs or robbing any of his rightful freedom to increase his own pleasure. This endless self-sacrifice in utter gladness of a new realization is the sign and symptom of the true 'Nam' culture of the Guru. No one can be man of truly human society, who has not obtained this divine spark which puts the self at rest, which thereby imbibes a nobility from God to leave everything along and gaze at Him with unending rapture and renunciation. Man need to be truly and inwardly a divine aristocrat to be truly democratic in this world.

In the constitution of the Khalsa commonwealth [10], the greatest act of genius of Guru Gobind Singh was when he transferred the divine sovereignty vested in him to the God-inspired people, the Khalsa. When speaking of the people, the Guru speaks of the people whose personality is transmuted into the divine personality of selfless being. As the chemist talks of pure elements just as they occur in nature, the Guru refers to the 'Pure' of the Cosmic Spirit and not as they are found with their blind animal instincts. In this one act lies our history and the future history of human progress. At Chamkaur when all was lost, he made His Five Disciples representative of the Guru, and gave them his insignia of Guruship and saluted them. The constitution of the Khalsa was thus built on the heart-shrines of humanity inspired with love of God, on the God-consciousness of Disciples, and not on law-books. Guru Gobind Singh would have died fighting on the battlefield even, as a while before, his two young sons had obtained the glory of martyrdom. But these 'Five Enthroned' asked him to go from the scene, and to do for the Khalsa, what only he, Guru Gobind Singh, could do. So, he went, herein the Guru's benign submission to the will of the Khalsa was complete and unconditional. To obey, to continue to live instead of fighting and dying, even in that great personal affliction of having seen his sons and his dear disciple soldiers dying before him, overwhelmed by odds, yet to go and live for them, as bidden by

them, is the supreme self-sacrifice of God for man, out of whose red flames of blood is born this Khalsa with the mysterious destiny.

In the Khalsa constitution, the people inspired by the natural goodness of humanity, by the spontaneous Divinity of God, by the Guru's mystic presence in all beings, are made supreme. They are the embodiment of Law and Justice fulfilled for ever in the love of Man. This state has but the Guru as Personal God. In this state, the Khalsa, the law of man's natural goodness is the only law [11].

Guru Gobind Singh was neither a Caesar nor an Aurangzeb. He was the true king of the people and a comrade of the people, in the truest representative spirit. Guru Gobind Singh founded the true democracy of the people in which there were no dead votes or votes won by mental persuasion or interested coercion. Democracy was a feeling in the bosom of the Khalsa and it gave an organic cohesion to the people who founded both society and state on the law of love, on Justice and Truth, not an impersonal system of the will of the blinded mob-representation by sympathy and not by dead votes. The Khalsa-State is an Ideal; Sikhs may die, it does not. It is immortal [12].

#### **4. Genesis of Hindu-Sikh Divide**

It might seem that owing to the hostility of an environment, and the not unoften deliberate attempts of the Hindu society to obliterate the Sikh ideals, Sikhs tend to deny any relationship with Hindu society. The Sikh may deny him or not, the Hindu has already denied the Sikh. The great Hindu culture and its innate influence on Sikh culture, however, cannot be denied. It would be to deny one's parentage. Such denials add nothing to the stature of the Sikh. All that is lofty and noble must be and is fully reflected in the soul of Sikhism, for matter of that, not Hindu culture alone, but all human culture itself. The Sikh is rather spiritualistic in his consciousness than metaphysical [13].

The songs of the Ten Gurus and the lives of unparalleled martyrdom have created a new race-emotion in the Punjab; the Sikhs are a new nation in its inspiration and its remarkable cohesion of the masses. The brief Sikh history and tradition inspire the Punjab peasants as no manner of religious fervour did before, which goes to show that the Sikh has a tradition and culture of his own which the Hindu has been unwilling to receive, though he wishes at times to pat him on the back as a kind of off-spring. It is unfair of the

Hindus to condemn the Sikhs for their attempts to cut themselves away from the mass of Hindudom. They make it a grievance that the Sikhs wish to make their church stand apart [14].

*In view of the political solidarity of India it is mischievous for any one to suggest that we are not of the Hindu and not equally of the Muslims. It is mischievous to multiply the point of difference with the Hindu which are not fundamental [15].*

The Gurus have shown to Hindus the way to freedom of mind and soul and also to political freedom. The Hindus, out of the spirit of vain intellectual pride have withheld themselves from the resurgence that Sikhism would bring. For the Hindus, the way to survival and freedom is the Guru's way. Unless they accept Guru Granth as their new Gita, the old scriptures and the stories from Ramayana and Mahabharata can no longer inspire new life into the mass of people whose backbone has been crushed by systematic metaphysical and theological burdens. Political slavery has been the result of their metaphysical mentality [16].

The Hindus in the Punjab have much to answer for. They find more in Bhagavad Gita and the old Veda than in Guru Granth. They love Hindi more than their mother-tongue. They relate themselves to the bards of Vedas more than the Gurus [17].

The Hindus failed Guru Gobind Singh: but Guru Gobind Singh has not failed them. They have not understood him; he understood them. As they have grown so apathetic, almost antagonistic to the message of the Gurus, it is essential that the basic unique character of Sikh culture should now be expressed [18].

## 5. Physics of Spirituality

In the scheme of human progress there is such a thing as the physics of spirituality; the Hindu has ignored it, the Western races have realized it [19]. Because of their comprehensive vision, the Khalsa shall have the spiritual and temporal sovereignty and all shall submit to it, soon or late. Only those shall be saved, who gather under this flag. The Hindus, so far, have not seen the significance of the Guru's creation, the Khalsa. Great Hindu philosophers like Tilak, Aurobindo and Tagore are reinterpreting the Gita and the Upanishads in order to come abreast with modern Western thought and scientific

conclusions. But they do not see that more than four hundred years ago, their own countrymen, the Sikh Gurus, actually worked all these modern tendencies into the constitution of the mind and society of this unhappy land, by creating the Khalsa. Their lives gave birth to a new country in this old one, and peopled it with a new race, with a universal religion of faith in man, and fired it with the spiritual passion for progress. Out of the Gurus came a daring, colonising race, lovers of land and agriculture, ready to start a new page of life at every turn. And of all the older texts the Sikh texts alone need not be tortured to come abreast with modern developments: they have woven the philosophy of the ancient scriptures in an organic whole. The Sikh life is the vindication of natural manhood and womanhood.

Some modern typical Hindus are trying to interpret Upanishads and the Gita in modern modes. But such attempts are against the traditional faith that has gathered round these books. And, however easily they may be interpreted in the modern modes, they have never shown the great reactivity that is attributed to them. In the past the teaching of the Gita has never been harnessed to action nor the Upanishads to love of the people. There has been no phenomena of transmutation of personality by a higher Being's personal touch on any large scale, as in Sikh history. The Upanishads are examples of mental splendor, unique and truly glorious. But without Buddhism and now without Sikhism in India, and without the modern spirit of the West, which lives and works and attains to knowledge by the experimental method, which is, as I term it, 'physics of spirituality', the Upanishads and Bhagavat Gita could never have been so interpreted. On the other hand, from close and devoted study of the Guru's hymns, I assert that many revolutionary tendencies are found in the Sikh thought, song and life. No texts need be turned upside down for it. It was atrocious not to have seen this, and to have ignored Sikh history, from the main features of the hostility of the racial environment in which Sikhism took its birth. The Sikh believes in one great culture of man which is yet to come. There is more future and past in Sikhism while there is all the emphasis on the past in Hinduism [20].

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